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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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DIFFICULTIES in estimating professional status have led to efforts toward forming some fair criterion which, at the same time, will be an aid to the candidate for executive positions. No one can rightly value experience till he has experienced its value. Even so, modifying factors must be taken into account. There is doubtless waste of energy to ourselves, as well as of material, used in the process of working our samplers of experience. Greater perfection will distinguish the samplers of those who have had, and made the most of, opportunity. There is much complexity surrounding the subject. Experience is the best teacher, but it is gauged by early education and by special training. Early education includes character, social position, and the education of the mind. This is an age of specializing, which makes the amount of preparation for life's work a matter of great moment. Standards have changed. Personality, prejudices, or ambitions prompt criticisms which are often unfair to the individual. Competition enters into the question. There is every reason for having a clear understanding as to what constitutes actual experience, which is a thing gradually acquired; for recognized standards of preliminary fitness; and for vouchers for personal characteristics and ability.

The part which character and its environment plays in the economy of experience cannot be overstated. Inner force and outward action are indissolubly connected. Moreover, it has been demonstrated in these days that health and good living have much to do with this inner force. It is a mistake to choose the mere push of youth over steady-going experience. But age, excepting its infirmities, is no real guide to efficiency. The ideal preparation for particular vocation is the training of the mind simultaneously with that of the inner and outer man. By social position is not meant wealth and luxury, but that kind of education which comes from homes which have harbored high thinking and noble deeds. And education of the mind is not the trying on of various systems, but that form of teaching which disciplines the mind into good intellectual habits, frees it from prejudice and false logic, and yet produces a mind not so plastic as to be easily swayed, nor deprived of the

force of conviction. Such development trains head and heart and hand. The education of life must keep pace with that of intellect, if the executive character is to be the result. Such a foundation is a good preparation for nursing.

Professional experience is, of course, related to the care of the sick as well as to hospital administration and to social service; and our special training largely determines our subsequent career. The cut and dried classification of members of the profession under executive ability and private nursing is in a measure unfortunate, though it cannot be denied that initiative and leadership are indispensable to the former. However, the object for which the hospital exists should never be lost sight of, and only the nurse who has distinguished herself in the care of the sick will be able to turn out good nurses from a training school. There is no doubt that our system of teaching in training schools for nurses is improving steadily. Preparatory instruction is widely being appreciated, and preliminary classes established in an increasing number of schools. This enables us to make the most of material; to save the patient from useless blunders; and the probationer from that unnecessary nerve-strain which accompanies the taking up of new and strange practical duties. In the care of the sick, preliminary training is next to the qualifications of the candidate for admission in importance. Training schools have long been feeling their way towards the best methods. The marked difference in qualification which candidates present is only an additional reason why preliminary training should aim at more uniform methods before the pupil is allowed to precipitate her errors upon the defenceless heads of patients.

Post-graduate courses in hospitals, and those connected with universities and colleges (which are quite comprehensive), are of the utmost value in meeting first responsibilities, or in re-inforcing one's experience with latest methods, as heads of hospitals. In first entering upon administrative experience, there is some danger of mishap through inexperience. Very often the knowledge we need comes too late to save the hospital or training school from loss, and from the train of woes following in the wake of mistaken action, or of inaction due to blindness of the present need, of being swayed this way and that by interruptions, wrong advice, and the like. We should have an experienced hand at the helm, and until the hand becomes so, the hospital ship will deviate according to the power which directs. First, there should be a clear idea of the departments of a hospital, and of the assignment of work to those delegated to look after them. To the young superintendent, the work of an institution appears *en masse*. She does not realize how much

depends upon classifying both work and workers; that frequent changes are disastrous, as breaking up the continuity of the work and the acquaintance of the worker with it. New persons, probably drawn from an equally important post, must be detailed to take up what someone has dropped. This refers to executives, and to any part of the hospital corps to whom work has been assigned, not to the pupil nurse, whose changes are regulated so as to give a fair training in all branches of nursing. Another instance of the desirability of being acquainted with the duties assumed, is that of buying, should that fall to the superintendent. This requires good business ability. Familiarity with its details will be a financial gain to the hospital. There must be an accurate knowledge of what is in stock, to avoid duplicating; orders must be followed up to see whether supplies have been received in good and satisfactory condition, that they are stored safely, given out wisely, and economically used. And the need of previous preparation has brought the cure in the special courses already established in hospitals, colleges, and in connection with social service, for those anticipating institutional positions, or for those who wish to add to what they already have, or who have been out of office and become rusty. These find a way of gaining or maintaining that efficiency necessary to the executive of hospital or training school.

Social service is of modern growth. Professionally, the best point of emergence is from the hospital outpatient or dispensary departments. Its motive is hospital extension. It strives to make the work of the hospital more effective. Its influence is far-reaching in restraining that great tide of evil which threatens to overthrow civilization. Only those who have lived in social settlements know the blackness of horror which this corruption, even of young life, spreads over one. A mighty force is needed for this most difficult work in all its forms. The opposing force has grown, and inconceivable wrong goes on its hideous way. The law is often helpless in the presence of such problems, and experience is the only sword which will divide the forces of evil. Harmony, and the spirit of helpfulness among all the various agencies, religious, educational, philanthropic, or simply humane, is of the greatest importance, if we are to bring counter influences equal to that of the enemy. In this harmony we see not only the original design of bringing help to our less fortunate brother and sister, but a certain generous invitation to every person who feels drawn to the work, to enrich his or her experience by that of others who have been long in the field, or to secure training preparatory to that particular end.